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Rembrandt's Powerful Late Portraits of Religious Figures Brought Together for First Time at National Gallery of Art, Washington



Rembrandt van Rijn

The Apostle Paul, c. 1657

oil on canvas, 131.5 x 104.4 cm (51 3/4 x 41 1/8)

framed: 177.8 x 150.5 x 13.3 cm (70 x 59 1/4 x 5 1/4)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

Washington, DC-- In early 2005, the National Gallery of Art will bring together for the first time Rembrandt van Rijn's powerful late portraits of religious figures, executed at a time

of great personal turmoil. **Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits** will offer a unique opportunity to explore one of the most fascinating aspects of the Dutch master's artistic career--his brooding and pensive religious images from the late 1650s and early 1660s. The 17 paintings gathered from public and private collections in the United States and Europe have raised compelling questions about their creation and purpose, as well as their relationships to each other and to Rembrandt's life and career.

The exhibition will be on view in the newly reinstalled Dutch galleries of the West Building, January 30 through May 1, 2005, and travel to the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, where it will be on view from June 7 through August 28, 2005. At the National Gallery, a related selection of prints and drawings by Rembrandt will be installed in the West Building Dutch Cabinet Galleries for the duration of this exhibition.

"The National Gallery of Art is delighted to bring together for the first time Rembrandt's religious portraits, which are among the most evocative and expressive paintings the artist ever created," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We hope that the exhibition will offer new insight into Rembrandt's work and will provide visual delight for our visitors to Washington and Los Angeles."

Exhibition Support

Generous support for this exhibition at the National Gallery of Art was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Saunders, III.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The Exhibition

Throughout Rembrandt's long and productive career in Leiden and Amsterdam, he returned repeatedly to the Bible as a source of inspiration. His paintings, drawings, and etchings depicted not only scenes and personalities from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, but also those found in the New Testament, particularly those centered on the life of Christ.

In the exhibition, many of the dramatic portraits depict Christ and the Virgin, but there

are also representations of the Apostles who devoted their lives to spreading the Gospel, among them Paul, Bartholomew, James, and Simon, and a number of the Evangelists, monks, and later saints. They include a self-portrait of the artist as the Apostle Paul and Rembrandt's last-known portrait of his companion Hendrickeje Stoffel, possibly a depiction of the Sorrowing Virgin, both painted in 1661. The men and women in these powerful images peer out of the dark recesses of dimly-lit interiors, burdened by the weight of their spiritual and emotional concerns. Executed shortly after Rembrandt's financial crises of the mid-1650s, when his expressive style of painting was no longer in demand by Amsterdam's elite, these half-length portrayals reflect Rembrandt's profound understanding of both the human and iconic character of their personalities. He renders not only their physical features but also the state of their psychological being.

For more than 80 years scholars have postulated that these religious portraits formed part of a series. By seeing these paintings together much can be learned about Rembrandt's painting techniques, particularly about the myriad of ways he applied his paint and modeled his forms to create his imposing images. The exhibition may also raise broader issues surrounding the nature of Rembrandt's workshop during this period of his career.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)

Rembrandt was born in Leyden in 1606 to a Calvinist miller and a baker's daughter from a Catholic family, the youngest of at least ten children. He attended Latin School and began his career with a certain degree of knowledge about 17th-century Italian art, based on his training with masters who had worked in Italy. He achieved fame in his twenties with his paintings of historical and religious subjects and concentrated on landscape painting in the late 1630s.

In 1631 he moved to Amsterdam, where he achieved tremendous success and attracted numerous lucrative portrait commissions, culminating with the celebrated painting known as *The Night Watch*, which he executed in 1642, the same year his wife Saskia died. They had four children, but only Titus, born in 1641, survived infancy. Rembrandt could never remarry as stipulated in Saskia's will. In 1649 he entered a

lifelong relationship with his son Titus' wet nurse Hendrickje Stoffels, a relationship that negatively affected their social standing.

The late 1650s, the years in which Rembrandt began to focus on these portraits of religious figures, were extremely difficult. He was forced to declare financial insolvency in 1656 and auctioned off his art collection and household possessions. Younger Amsterdam artists largely deserted Rembrandt's deeply personal manner of painting. Although he remained famous as an artist, Rembrandt faced many personal burdens, including the deaths of Hendrickje and Titus, due to epidemics. On October 4, 1669, he was buried in an unknown rented grave in the Westerkerk, Amsterdam,

Curators, Catalogue, and Related Activities

The curator of the exhibition is Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque painting at the National Gallery of Art since 1984, and curator of such major Gallery exhibitions as **Johannes Vermeer** (1995–1996) and **Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller** (1996).

Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with University of Chicago Press. The 152-page exhibition catalogue includes full-color reproductions and entries for each of the paintings in the exhibition written by Wheelock, Peter C. Sutton, Volker Manuth, and Anne T. Woollett (hardcover, \$40).

On Sunday, January 30, 2005, at 2:00 p.m., in a program titled "Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits," this master's work will be discussed by noted specialists of Dutch art, including Wheelock and Ernst van de Wetering of the Rembrandt Research Project.

Special gallery talks and concerts are also planned for early 2005. For more information on all of the programs, call (202) 842-6826 or visit www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/home.htm>). All interviews and lectures are free and open to the public; seating is on a first-come, first-seated basis.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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